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The articles selected for this special issue span 37 years of scholarship from 1977 to 2014 and reflect the changing nature of what it means to be an academic member of staff in a number of countries. The journal itself has undergone considerable changes including a gradual shift towards more international contributors rather than mostly publishing UK writers and a move away from a focus on teaching, learning and assessment towards a broader coverage of the field.

The considerable development of the literature on academic identities since the first of these articles was published in 1977 has included, *inter alia*, a greater exploration of the role of disciplines, the effects of new forms of research governance, the continuities and the discontinuities of the teaching-research nexus, the development of beginning academics, the impacts of new managerialism and quality assurance regimes, and the relationship between gender and academic identity.

The shifting nature and diverse challenges associated with being an academic are reflected in words which appear in some of the titles we have selected such as 'recodification' (Lapping, 2006), 'restructuring' (Moore, 2003), 'complexity' (Robertson, 2007), 'constraints' (Åkerlind, 2007) and 'change' (Lee and Boud, 2003). In short, many articles identify tensions between the individual and collective *habitus* of the academic, a distinction made by Jeff Jawitz (2009) in his contribution to this virtual issue.

Understanding, mapping and resisting the effects of change in academic life is likely to continue to attract the attention of researchers, illustrated most recently by a recent special issue of *Studies* which explored the relationship between academic work and generational change (Volume 40, Issue 8, 2015). Constant flux means that (re)examining what it means to be an academic will remain a key area of enquiry in higher education research.

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